

Victorian Elder Abuse Strategic Alliance (VEASA)

Submission for the Victorian State Budget 2026-27

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1. About VEASA

The Victorian Elder Abuse Strategic Alliance is a coalition of leading organisations at the forefront of preventing and responding to elder abuse in Victoria. Its membership includes peak bodies, research institutions, legal professionals, and frontline services. VEASA is coordinated and led by the Council on the Ageing (COTA) Victoria and Seniors Rights Victoria (SRV).

Our mission is to lead policy and systemic reform so that older Victorians live free from abuse, supported by inclusive, coordinated, and well-resourced services.

2. About this submission

This submission reflects emerging pressures across Victoria's elder abuse and family violence systems. It calls for strategic investment through the 2026–27 Victorian State Budget to strengthen prevention, early intervention, response, and recovery.

Elder abuse is defined by the World Health Organisation as, “any act or failure to act within a relationship of trust that causes harm or distress to an older person.”

Elder abuse occurs in all kinds of relationships; between family generations, with intimate partners, and in non-family relationships, such as those involving carers, professionals, and neighbours. In Australia, it is most commonly perpetrated by adult children or others in family-like relationships.

Due to a range of personal, cultural, and systemic factors, elder abuse often goes undetected. Limited awareness and the subtle nature of psychological or financial abuse make signs easy to miss, while cultural stigma, ageist attitudes, and language barriers further obscure recognition. Older people themselves may remain silent out of fear, shame, dependence on the abuser, or a wish to preserve family relationships. These barriers, combined with systemic ageism, allow abuse to remain hidden, unreported, and unaddressed.

Nonetheless, a 2021 national study found that 14.8% of Australians aged 65+, around 160,000 older Victorians, experience elder abuse annually, a rate higher than in comparable countries including Canada (10%), the US (9.5%), and the UK (14%). This figure is likely to be higher, due to underreporting associated with the aforementioned barriers.

Without decisive action, this form of family violence will escalate as Victoria's population ages.

3. A clear opportunity for action

To address the shortfall in prevention, early intervention, response and recovery needs of elder abuse victim-survivors and organisations, VEASA would like to put forward six targeted actions for your consideration.

In practice, these actions would enable Victoria to better meet demand, through an increased capacity to prevent and respond to, and to support victim-survivors to recover from, elder abuse.

1. Increase funding to legal and advocacy support services, such as Seniors Rights Victoria and Eastern Community Legal Centre (ECLC), to strengthen the state-wide helpline, legal advice, and advocacy service, including service delivery.
2. Strengthen family violence system responses to older victims by funding ten elder abuse Liaison and Consultation

Officers to support Orange Door services across select locations, providing case management advice, support, and referral for more complex cases involving elder abuse by any family member.

3. Reinstate and expand the Integrated Model of Care (IMOC) for elder abuse across priority hospitals, by providing elder abuse social worker roles to support older people at risk during and post discharge.
4. Expand Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework (MARAM)-aligned elder abuse training across health, community, aged care, legal, and financial services workforces.
5. Create and disseminate standardised screening tools and referral protocols for GPs, social workers, and aged care staff to recognise and act on elder abuse.
6. Invest in a state-wide culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) elder abuse prevention program delivered through ethnic and multicultural organisations.

4. Endorsing members

VEASA's membership includes statutory bodies and other entities that cannot formally endorse government submissions; however, their input and guidance have been instrumental in shaping this submission.



5. Context

Elder abuse is a growing and preventable form of family violence that demands systemic reform. In 2021, an estimated 160,000 older Victorians experienced abuse, most commonly psychological and financial. Without intervention, this number will escalate sharply as Victoria's population ages. By 2046, the number of Victorians aged 60 and over will increase by 60% to 2.3 million. If prevalence remains unchanged, more than 340,000 older people could experience elder abuse each year.

Elder abuse most often occurs within trusted relationships, between adult children, partners, carers, or others with close personal ties. It is frequently hidden by shame, dependency, and social stigma. The consequences are profound: increased rates of depression, anxiety, homelessness, isolation, and premature death.

While individual circumstances such as mental illness, family stress, or substance use can contribute, systemic ageism remains a central driver. When older people are undervalued or dismissed, abuse is both more likely to occur and less likely to be recognised or addressed.

5.1. Rising demand, limited capacity

Awareness of elder abuse has grown, but service capacity has not kept pace.

- Justice system data shows a 38% increase in elder abuse cases over five years, compared to 12.7% growth across all age groups.
- Only 3% of Orange Door clients are aged 65 or older, despite older people representing 7% of family violence reports to police, indicating significant under-recognition within the core system.
- SRV received over 13,000 calls for help in 2024–25 but could respond to only 30% due to funding constraints. Financial abuse now accounts for nearly half

of all SRV cases, and their complexity continues to rise.

These trends reflect a system stretched beyond capacity. Many older people — particularly from First Nations, CALD, LGBTIQ+, and rural communities — struggle to access timely, appropriate support. Without adequate resources, responses remain reactive, pushing costs downstream into the health, housing, and justice systems.

5.2. Systemic gaps

Elder abuse differs fundamentally from other forms of family violence, yet existing systems are designed primarily for intimate partner violence. This misalignment leaves older people underserved and unseen.

- Abuse is often intergenerational, with adult children the most common perpetrators.
- Victim-survivors are frequently financially or physically dependent on the person harming them.
- Mainstream family violence services lack the frameworks, tools, and training to manage the complexity of elder abuse dynamics.

The gaps are particularly wide for older people in marginalised communities, where distrust of mainstream institutions, language barriers, and cultural stigma compound the risk. Many rely on informal intermediaries such as community leaders, carers, and volunteers who are themselves unsupported.

At a system level, Victoria lacks a coordinated, state-wide data framework. Inconsistent data collection across justice, health, and community sectors makes it impossible to accurately track prevalence, measure outcomes, or target resources effectively. The result is a fragmented, crisis-driven system that struggles to prevent or resolve abuse.

5.3. Financial insecurity and gender inequality

Economic vulnerability is both a driver of elder abuse and a barrier to escaping it. Many older people remain in unsafe circumstances because they cannot afford to leave.

Common patterns include:

- Financial coercion, such as pressure to invest in family property (e.g. “granny flats” or shared ownership) without legal protection often resulting in homelessness when relationships break down.
- Gendered economic disadvantage: Women who leave the workforce due to family violence retire with 32% less superannuation; two-thirds of older women who rent live below the poverty line. Those who experience family violence at a younger age are at a higher risk of experiencing elder abuse.
- Lethal outcomes: Between 2000 and 2017, at least 74 Australians aged 55+ died as a result of elder abuse; in one-third of cases the perpetrator was a son, and in nearly one in three, financial motives were involved.

These figures illustrate the intersection between gender inequality, economic insecurity, and elder abuse. Structural inequities, including lifetime income inequality, systemic ageism, and sexism in the workforce, and housing unaffordability, compound the problem. Without targeted intervention, particularly for older women lower-income individuals, these risks will continue to escalate.

5.4. The need for tailored and inclusive responses

Despite progress in public awareness, current family violence systems remain mismatched to the reality of elder abuse. Policies, funding models, and workforce training still prioritise

partner violence, overlooking the distinct patterns and needs of older victim-survivors.

This gap is especially harmful for those facing multiple forms of disadvantage including many First Nations Elders, CALD and LGBTIQ+ communities, people with disabilities, and those in regional areas. They experience compounded barriers to reporting and support, often relying on informal or culturally specific networks that are under-resourced.

Without reform, Victoria risks a two-tiered system in which some older people can access specialist help, while many others, particularly from vulnerable communities, continue to fall through the cracks.

5.5. The case for integrated, person-centred systems

Elder abuse cuts across health, legal, housing, aged care, and community sectors. Yet responses remain fragmented, with victim-survivors too often left to navigate complex systems on their own.

A different approach is needed. This approach should be integrated, person-centred, and culturally safe, embedding elder abuse responses across all relevant service systems. Investment in integrated models of care, shared data frameworks, and coordinated training can deliver earlier intervention, stronger recovery outcomes, and better value for public investment.

Without this systemic shift, elder abuse will remain under-recognised, under-reported and inadequately addressed at great human and economic cost.

6. Our recommendations

The following six recommendations outline practical, evidence-informed measures that the Victorian Government can adopt in the 2026–27 State Budget. Together, they provide a roadmap

to prevention, early intervention, recovery, and systemic improvement.

6.1. Increase funding to legal and advocacy support services

Funding shortfalls have curtailed the reach of elder abuse legal and advocacy services such as SRV and ECLC. Expanding funding to these services, in line with increasing service demand and complexity, would:

- Stabilise the state-wide helpline as the first port of call.
- Integrate financial counselling into legal advocacy to address financial abuse.
- Restore capacity for proactive casework and outreach.

6.2. Strengthen family violence system responses

Support older victims of family violence by funding ten elder abuse Liaison and Consultation Officers to support Orange Door services across select locations, providing case management advice, support and referral for more complex cases involving elder abuse by any family member.

6.3. Reinstate and expand the IMOC

Embedding elder abuse support across health systems enables early identification and intervention in clinical settings. The IMOC demonstrated success in connecting older people with specialist support before abuse escalates. Reinstating and expanding this model would:

- Reduce downstream costs in justice and health.
- Provide hospitals with dedicated pathways to specialist advice and referral.
- Normalise recognition of elder abuse within health services.

6.4. Expand MARAM-aligned elder abuse training

Training is essential to build workforce capability across health, community, aged care, legal, and financial services. Expanding MARAM-aligned training, developed in consultation with diverse communities and sector representatives, would:

- Equip frontline staff with the skills to identify and respond to elder abuse.
- Create consistency across sectors, reducing the risk of misidentification or referral gaps.
- Increase capacity to consult with diverse communities on screening tools and training.

6.5. Develop standardised screening tools and referral protocols

GPs, social workers, and aged care providers are often the first to observe signs of abuse. Standardised tools would:

- Ensure early and accurate identification.
- Provide clear referral pathways to specialist support.
- Improve confidence in responding across diverse workforces.

6.6. Fund state-wide elder abuse prevention programs for diverse communities

Older people from marginalised communities often rely on specialist community organisations for trusted support. A co-developed program, that is flexible to implementation and delivery via trusted, locally-based community organisations would:

- Support targeted primary prevention and early intervention, through awareness and support service readiness for marginalised communities.

- Consult with specialist organisations on the needs and experiences of their communities.
- Deliver targeted culturally safe and person-centred education and awareness initiatives.
- Strengthen links between mainstream services and community leaders.

7. Conclusion

These investments will promote prevention, enable early intervention, build capacity, strengthen recovery pathways, and address the unique vulnerabilities of older Victorians experiencing abuse.

Elder abuse is a pervasive and preventable form of family violence. With 160,000 older Victorians affected each year and demand for services sharply rising, there is an urgent need for the Victorian Government to act through the 2026–27 State Budget.

The six recommended actions provide a practical and evidence-informed roadmap for preventing, responding to, and supporting recovery from elder abuse. By investing now, Victoria can not only meet rising demand but also build a safer and more inclusive community for older people.